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WASHINGTON (AP) - The Reagan administration in intelligence agencies more freedom to follow Americans at home and abroad; a top Justice Department official says.

Richard Willard, chief of Attorney General William French Smith's Office of Intelligence Policy, said physical surveillance of Americans "is an example of an area where the Carter administration may have gone too far in putting restrictions on intelligence activities that are not constitutionally required."

He would not spell out exactly which restrictions will be lifted. Former President Jimmy Carter limited physical surveillance of U.S. residents and corporations in this country to lawful FBI investigations or efforts by other intelligence agencies to watch their own employees or contractors in the course of protecting their own secrets.

Abroad, Carter allowed surveillance of Americans by any U.S. intelligence agency if they were thought to be agents of a foreign power or engaged in international terrorism or narcotics trafficking. The Carter order was designed to prevent recurrence of the scandals of the 1960s and 1970s when congressional committees found that U.S. intelligence agencies spied on Americans who were simply exercising their right to protest government policy, particularly on Vietnam and civil rights.

Willard, who spoke in a recent interview, is playing a key role in an inter-agency task force drafting the Reagan administration's revision of Carter's 1978 executive order which set rules for U.S. intelligence agencies. Some intelligence community sources say the new order, two early versions of which already have leaked to the press, might be ready by mid-September.

With decisions pending, Willard would not detail planned changes but said: "Where there is flexibility in the law, our inclination is to give intelligence agencies more freedom of operation."

He said the new order will require fewer layers of approval before the agencies can employ some techniques and will dispense with some restrictions, such as some of those on physical surveillance, which go beyond court rulings in constitutional cases.

The first draft which leaked in spring would have allowed the CIA to conduct domestic bugging and break-ins and to infiltrate domestic groups with foreign ties in an effort to influence their activities. That draft also eliminated the requirement that the attorney general approve each instance of intrusive tactics of electronic eavesdropping.